



What Should Parents Know About Standardized Testing in Schools?

One tool that schools use to learn about students is the standardized test. This page explains basic features of these tests and suggests questions you might ask your child's teacher about testing. Understanding the role of testing will help you to enable your child to succeed in school and to develop a better relationship between your family and your child's school.

What Are Standardized Tests?

Usually created by commercial test publishers, standardized tests are designed to give a common measure of students' performance. Because large numbers of students throughout the country take the same test, they give educators a common yardstick or "standard" of measure. Educators use these standardized tests to tell how well school programs are succeeding or to give themselves a picture of the skills and abilities of today's students.

Why Do Schools Use Standardized Tests?

Standardized tests can help teachers and administrators make decisions regarding the instructional program. They help schools measure how students in a given class, school, or school system perform in relation to other students who take the same test. Using the results from these tests, teachers and administrators can evaluate the school system, a school program, or a particular student.

How Do Schools Use Standardized Tests?

Different types of standardized tests have different purposes. Standardized achievement tests measure how much students have already learned about a school subject. The results from these tests can help teachers develop programs that suit students' achievement levels in each subject area, such as reading, math, language skills, spelling, or science.

Educators most commonly use achievement tests to:

- Evaluate school programs;
- Report on students' progress;
- Diagnose students' strengths and weaknesses;
- Select students for special programs;
- Place students in special groups; and
- Certify student achievement (for example, award high school diplomas or promote students from grade to grade).

Can Standardized Tests Alone Determine My Child's Placement in the Classroom?

No. Paper-and-pencil tests give teachers only part of the picture of your child's strengths and weaknesses. Teachers combine the results of many methods to gain insights into the skills, abilities, and knowledge of your child. These methods include:

- Observing students in the classroom;
- Evaluating their day-to-day class work;
- Grading their homework assignments;
- Meeting with their parents; and
- Keeping close track of how students change or grow throughout the year.

Standardized tests have limitations. These tests are not perfect measures of what individual students can or cannot do or of everything students learn. Also, your child's scores on a particular test may vary from day to day, depending on whether your child guesses, receives clear directions, follows the directions carefully, takes the test seriously, and is comfortable in taking the test.

How Can I Help My Child Do Well On Tests?

Here are a few suggestions for parents who want to help their children do well on tests.

- First and most important, talk to your child's teacher often to monitor your child's progress and find out what activities you can do at home to help your child.
- Make sure your child does his or her homework.
- Make sure your child is well-rested and eats a well- rounded diet.
- Have a variety of books and magazines at home to encourage your child's curiosity.
- Don't be overly anxious about test scores, but encourage your child to take tests seriously.
- Don't judge your child on the basis of a simple test score.

What Should I Ask My Child's Teacher?

Before the test . . .

- Which tests will be administered during the school year and for what purposes?
- How will the teacher or the school use the results of the test?
- What other means of evaluation will the teacher or the school use to measure your child's performance?
- Should your child practice taking tests?

After the test . . .

- How do students in your child's school compare with students in other school systems in your state and across the country?
- What do the test results mean about your child's skills and abilities?
- Are the test results consistent with your child's performance in the classroom?
- Are any changes anticipated in your child's educational program?
- What can you do at home to help your child strengthen particular skills? What Are My Legal Rights?

Several precedents and laws define legal rights related to taking tests in school:

- Under the Family Education Rights and Privacy Act of 1974, also known as the Buckley Amendment, you have a right to examine your child's academic records. If these records contain test scores, you have a right to see those scores as well.
- Your child has a right to due process. For example, your child must get adequate notice when a test is required for high school graduation and adequate time to prepare for the test.
- Your child has a right to fair and equitable treatment. Schools cannot, for example, have different test score requirements based on gender or race.

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